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⑤④ **Auditory stimulation using cw and pulsed signals.**

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Description

This invention relates to an auditory stimulation system, and more particularly to such a system for auditory stimulation of the deaf.

Disclosed in US—A—4284856 and US—A—4357497 are transcutaneous auditory stimulation systems in which electrical signals corresponding to different audio frequency bands are transmitted by multi-channel RF transmission means to a coupled transcutaneous receiver. The receiver demodulates the signals, and the signals are then applied as analog signals to a multi-electrode prosthesis implanted in the cochlea.

US—A—4419995 discloses the use of electrodes placed at or near the base of the cochlea for imparting full speech patterns without the need of penetrating the cochlea.

More recently, the use of a pulsatile signal for transmitting audio signals has been proposed, as disclosed in US—A—4441202. In this system, an input speech signal is passed through a filter circuit, zero crossing counter, and RMS measuring circuit for producing signals representing amplitude and frequency of the fundamental voicing component and the first three formants of the speech signal. Computer means is then utilized to determine the manner of stimulation of implanted electrodes by ranking the sharpness of the electrodes in assigning sub-bands of the second format frequency range to particular electrodes. The formant and prosodic information is applied to the electrodes in pulse form.

Users of transcutaneous audio stimulation systems have noted that their understanding rapidly decreases in the presence of background noise.

According to this invention, there is provided an auditory stimulating system comprising sound processing means for generating signals in response to audio signals; transmission means for transmitting the generated signals; receiver means for receiving the generated signals; and multi-electrode prosthesis for stimulating the cochlea of a user of the system; and means interconnecting said receiver means and said prosthesis whereby the generated signals stimulate the auditory nerve of the user of the system, characterised in that the generated signals comprise an analog signal indicative of audio sounds and a pulsatile signal indicative of features of audio sounds, the analog signal and the pulsatile signal concurrently stimulating the auditory nerve of the user of the system.

Experiments have demonstrated that an unexpected improvement in noise susceptibility can be realized by using a multi-channel transmission system with at least one analog signal transmitted in one channel being combined with at least one pulsatile signal transmitted in another channel.

The analog signal can be generated by compressing the audio signal in amplitude, adjusting the compressed signal to match the frequency response of the user of the system, and then

transmitting the analog signal in a channel to the stimulation electrode which gives the best speech understanding. The analog signal preferably has a bandwidth of approximately 100—5,000 Hertz.

The pulsatile signal provides certain selected speech features such as a first and second formant frequency and speech frequency. These extracted features can be presented to the user using the first or second formant frequency as the pulse rate with a specific frequency band always presented to a particular electrode channel. Alternatively, the formant frequency can be presented to one particular electrode channel with the stimulating pulse rate being directly derived from the pitch frequency. The pulse amplitude can be proportional to the formant amplitude or to the RMS value of the entire audio signal.

The invention will now be described by way of example with reference to the drawings in which:—

Figure 1 is a functional block diagram of a multi-channel auditory stimulation system in accordance with the invention:

Figure 2 is a schematic illustrating the placement of electrodes for stimulating the cochlea;

Figure 3 is a schematic of second formant frequency extraction circuitry; and

Figure 4 is a schematic of second formant amplitude circuitry.

Referring now to the drawings, Figure 1 is a functional block diagram of a multichannel speech coding system in accordance with one embodiment of the invention. In this embodiment several transmission and electrode channels are provided. The speech processor contains a microphone 10, a preamplifier 12, and a bandpass filter 14 to limit the frequency range of the audio signal to be processed to the bandwidth necessary for speech transmission (150 Hz to 5 kHz), a slow automatic gain control (AGC) 16 to adjust the audio-amplification to the actual speech level, and a fast AGC (syllabic compression) 18 to enhance the consonant-to-vowel ratio.

Speech is received by microphone 10 and amplified by preamplifier 12. The amplified speech signals are passed through the bandpass filter 14, the slow gain controlled amplifier 16 and the fast gain controlled amplifier 18 functioning as a syllabic compressor to increase the consonant-to-vowel amplitude ratio in order to fit the speech signals within the narrow dynamic range of the electrically stimulated auditory system.

Thereafter, the signal is processed by several paths in parallel. In the analog path the signal is equalized by the individually adjusted frequency response of a filter network 20 in such a way that all frequencies within the audio band used sound equally loud. This analog signal is then encoded by an adaptive delta modulator (ADM) 22 into a 48 kHz bit stream and applied to OR gate 52.

This channel provides the broad-band analog signal as described in US—A—4357497.

The signals for the pulsatile stimulation channels are interleaved in between the 48 kHz

analog channel information as provided by the ADM encoder 22. The pulsatile stimulation channels represent selected features of speech.

The features extracted in this example are pitch (F_0), the 2 second formant frequency (F_2), and the amplitude A_2 . Other features which could be selected are, for example, the first formant features F_1 , A_1 and the third formant features, F_3 and A_3 .

In order to provide the patient with reliable pitch and formant estimates in noisy environments where the speech to noise ratio is low, the strategies used are selected from a variety of known possibilities for their robustness, i.e. noise suppression characteristics.

The pitch information is used to generate pulsatile stimulation signals (pulse rate approximately from 100 to 300 pulses/sec) in a 20.8 s sampling interval detector 31, a pulse generator 32 and D-flip-flop 33 which is driven by the same clock 24 (48 kHz) used for the ADM encoder. Appended to these stimulation pulses, which determine the rate of stimulation, is a coded channel number and the amplitude information. Circuitry 41, described in more detail in Figures 3 and 4, extracts the second formant, and the frequency thereof is applied through A—D converter 42 to the channel coder 44. The amplitude is applied through A—D converter 43 to the coding circuit 45. The channel number determines the location within the scala tympani of the electrode contact to be used for stimulation. This provides some tonotopic information in addition to the temporal information provided by the analog channel. The redundancy thus obtained is intended to help the patient to recognize speech sounds also in noise environments. The channel number, as well as the amplitude information is obtained from the F_2 -extraction circuit 41. The number of the channel which is to be reserved for the analog signal is set by a number of switches. The data from flip-flop 33, coder 44, and coder 45 are multiplexed in parallel to serial converter 47 and then applied to OR gate 52. The signals for all the different stimulation channels are transmitted by one rf-carrier in transmitter 53.

The digitally encoded information for the pulsatile stimulation is combined with the digitally encoded information (ADM) for the analog stimulation signal, which may be in the same channel or in a different transmission channel. A parity check information is appended to this combined signal, which is used to modulate an rf-transmitter providing the transcutaneous link to the implanted receiver as disclosed in US—A—4357497.

The implanted receiver 55, which is coupled to transmitter 53 by coils 54, comprises a tuned receiver coil, a signal demodulator, a power supply circuit which provides the dc-power necessary to run the implanted circuitry for rectifying the rf-carrier, circuitry for decoding and error detection, and the electrode drivers. All electronic circuitry is encapsulated in a hermetic package.

After converting the serial bit stream provided by the demodulator into parallel form by the serial-parallel converter and after error checking, decoding provides

a) the analog stimulation signal (ADM decoder)
b) the stimulation pulses of correct amplitude and duration (pulse width and pulse amplitude decoder)

c) the channel number, i.e. the stimulation site.
The particular electrode driver which will provide the stimulation current is selected by adequately addressing the multiplexer.

It is possible to simultaneously stimulate the channel selected to receive the analog signal and up to two channels for pulsatile stimulation.

For each patient it is individually decided which electrode channel carries which signal. The broad band analog signal is directed to that channel which gives optimum performance with this signal for best speech understanding by the patient. The remaining channels are ranked according to the timbre they provide and they thus correspond to eight individual formant frequency ranges.

The channel number information necessary to direct the analog stimulation signal and the pulsatile stimulation signals to the electrodes intended, is transmitted together with the amplitude and pulsewidth information.

Choosing a particular electrode channel requires that the corresponding sound-processing channel be adapted to the characteristics of this particular electrode channel (frequency response, discomfort threshold, dynamic range). This is also true for the pulsatile stimulation signals. The specificity of the responses which can be elected via different electrode channels (e.g. dynamic range, discomfort threshold, frequency response) has to be accounted for in the corresponding channels of the sound processor.

Referring now to Figure 2, electrode structures are illustrated which can be used for stimulating the cochlea. In one embodiment an elongated prosthesis 60 including a plurality of electrodes 62 is inserted within the cochlea to selectively stimulate the cochlea in accordance with the frequency response thereof, in accordance with US—A—4357497. Selected electrodes are connected to the several channels in the transmitter and receiver. Alternatively, electrodes can be provided at the base of the cochlea such as electrodes 56 and 58. As disclosed in US—A—4419995 the active electrode 58 is preferably placed in the round window at the base of the cochlea or on the promontary. The ground electrode 56 is placed 2—10 millimeters from the active electrode to thereby confine the electric field. The two electrodes can be stimulated from the multiple channels, or alternatively a pair of electrodes can be provided for each channel.

Consider now the circuitry of Figures 3 and 4 for extracting second formant frequency and amplitudes. In vowel identification tasks, confusions occur most frequently between vowels with similar first and different second formant. To

improve vowel identification with cochlea prostheses, it therefore seems reasonable to present F2-information via one or more channels in addition to the broadband analog speech signal transmitted in the first channel. If the second formant in vowel identification tasks is extracted via speech analysis programs by a computer and presented to patients through a second channel, the scores of the patients in this kind of task seem to be higher than those obtained with the single channel only. But formant tracking using a computer and sophisticated software is not usable with a wearable speech processor. Therefore, a hardware realization for the formant extraction with a minimum number of components and minimized power consumption is necessary.

Tradeoffs between tracking accuracy and circuit complexity are necessary. For example, the second formant is not the only cue in discrimination of vowels, another cue is the center of gravity of the spectrum, which usually, but not always, more or less closely follows second formant location. For very limited systems it is easier to estimate the part of the spectrum where most of the signal energy is concentrated where the second formant is expected. Experiments have been conducted of methods to extract the second formant or to locate the maximum of the spectral density. Figures 3 and 4 show the circuit diagrams of one of these methods, the "tunable band pass filter method".

In Figure 3, the input from AGC 18 is amplified at 70 and applied to tunable filter 72 (National SC MF 10). Lowpass (LP), bandpass (BP), and highpass (HP) outputs from filter 72 are applied to ac converter and log amplifiers 74 and 76 and tunable filter 78, respectively. The outputs of converter-log amplifiers 74 and 76 are subtracted by differential amplifier 80, and the output of amplifier 80 is applied through filter 82 to a phase locked loop 84 (PLL 4045). The output of PLL 82 is applied as the clock signal to filter 72. The output of tunable filter 78 is the F2 frequency output.

A simple bandpass filter being swept over the frequency range of an input signal consecutively outputs the amplitude of the spectral components (integrated over the bandwidth of the filter) of the input signal. If its tuning is controlled in such a way that the output voltage is maximized, the center frequency of the filter indicates the frequency of the maximum of the spectrum. In order to obtain a sufficiently accurate output signal, the filter bandwidth must be compatible with the expected rate of amplitude density change of the spectrum of the (speech) input signal and with the expected sweep rate of the filter as well. The sweep rate again depends on the rate of change of the formant frequencies (approximate second formant) of the input signal. The center frequency can always be tuned in such a way, that the maximum of the amplitude is at the center frequency. Thus the center frequency traces the second formant or the spectral center of gravity. The output of the bandpass filter cannot drive the control circuit directly, because there is no phase

information available and so the direction of tuning necessary is unknown. The information for the direction of tuning is gained as follows.

There are a highpass and a lowpass filter tracking the bandpass filter, their cutoff frequencies are the same as the center frequency of the bandpass filter. The control circuit adjusts its output voltage in such a way, that the output voltages of the highpass and the lowpass filter are equal. Such a filter which can produce various second order functions is called a universal filter. The center frequency of the lowpass, highpass and bandpass functions are directly dependent on the external resistor and capacitory values. The center frequency can be changed without changing the quality factor of the filters. The quality factor of the bandpass filter is fixed at 4.7. The center frequency of the tunable filter 72 is directly dependent on the clock frequency from PLL 84. The signal to noise ratio is somewhat low, but this is of no consequence since the dynamic ranges of out patients are small as well. The comparison of the outputs of the lowpass and the highpass is done by a differential amplifier 80. The filter output is applied to voltage controlled oscillator 84 driving the clock input of the universal filter. The clock frequency is proportional to the center frequency of the bandpass filter and thus to the extracted formant as well. Figure 4 produces the amplitude signal for the second formant. The F₂ frequency output from Figure 3 is applied to the operational amplifier rectification circuit 90, and the rectified output from circuit 90 is applied to lowpass filter 92.

By applying to the implanted electrodes both a continuous wave analog signal representing the speech pattern along with a pulsatile signal representing selected features of the speech pattern, improved speech understanding has been realized by deaf patients by reducing noise susceptibility.

Claims

1. An auditory stimulating system comprising sound processing means (10) for generating signals in response to audio signals; transmission means (53) for transmitting the generated signals; receiver means (55) for receiving the generated signals; a multi-electrode prosthesis (60) for stimulating the cochlea of a user of the system; and means interconnecting said receiver means (55) and said prosthesis (60) whereby the generated signals stimulate the auditory nerve of the user of the system, characterized in that the generated signals comprise an analog signal indicative of audio sounds and a pulsatile signal indicative of features of audio sounds, the analog signal and the pulsatile signal concurrently stimulating the auditory nerve of the user of the system.

2. A system as claimed in Claim 1, characterized in that said analog signal is transmitted to at least one prosthesis electrode selected to provide best speech understanding to the user of the system.

3. A system as claimed in Claim 1 or Claim 2, characterized in that said prosthesis (60) is adapted to being inserted into the cochlea, the electrodes (62) thereof corresponding to different audio frequency ranges.

4. A system as claimed in Claim 1 and Claim 2, characterized in that prosthesis (60) comprises electrodes (56, 58) for placement outside of the cochlea for stimulating the auditory nerve of the user of the system.

5. A system as claimed in any preceding claim, characterized in that said analog signal and said pulsatile signal are transmitted via separate transmission channels.

6. A system as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 4, characterized in that said sound processing means generates a digitized analog signal, said digitized analog signal and said pulsatile signal being transmitted as a multiplexed composite signal.

7. A system as claimed in any preceding claim, characterized in that said sound processing means generates a pulsatile signal that has a pulse rate corresponding to a formant frequency of an audio input.

8. A system as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 6, characterized in that said sound processing means generates a pulsatile signal that has a pulse rate derived from pitch frequency of an audio input.

9. A system as claimed in any preceding claim, characterized in that said sound processing means generates at least two pulsatile signals that are transmitted to said prosthesis (60), said two pulsatile signals representing different audio input features.

10. A system as claimed in Claim 9, characterized in that said different audio input features are pitch frequency and formant frequency.

11. A system as claimed in any preceding claim, characterized in that said interconnecting means applies said analog signal and said pulsatile signal to the same electrode of said prosthesis (60).

Patentansprüche

1. Anordnung zur Gehör-Stimulation, mit einer Tonverarbeitungseinrichtung (10) zum Erzeugen von den Audiosignalen entsprechenden Signalen, einer Sendeeinrichtung (53) zum Senden der erzeugten Signale, einer Empfangseinrichtung (55) zum Empfangen der erzeugten Signale, einer mehrere Elektroden umfassenden Prothese (60) zum Stimulieren der Cochlea eines Benutzers der Anordnung, und Einrichtungen zum Verbinden der Empfangereinrichtung (55) und der Prothese (60), wodurch die erzeugten Signale den Gehörnerv des Benutzers der Anordnung stimulieren, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die erzeugten Signale ein Analogsignal, das die Tonklänge wiedergibt, und ein pulsierendes Signal umfaßt, das Merkmale der Tonklänge wiedergibt, wobei das Analogsignal und das pulsierende Signal gleichzeitig den Gehörnerv des Benutzers der Anordnung stimulieren.

2. Anordnung nach Anspruch 1, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß das Analogsignal wenigstens einer Prothesen-Elektrode zugeführt wird, die so gewählt ist, daß für den Benutzer der Anordnung das beste Sprachverständnis erzielt wird.

3. Anordnung nach Anspruch 1 oder 2, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die Prothese (60) in die Cochlea eingesetzt werden kann, deren Elektroden (62) verschiedenen Hörfrequenz-Bereichen entsprechen.

4. Anordnung nach Anspruch 1 und 2, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die Prothese (60) Elektroden (56, 58) zur Anordnung außerhalb der Cochlea zum Stimulieren des Gehörmerks des Benutzers der Anordnung enthält.

5. Anordnung nach einem der vorstehenden Ansprüche, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß das Analogsignal und das pulsierende Signal über getrennte Sendekanäle übertragen werden.

6. Anordnung nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 4, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die Tonverarbeitungseinrichtung ein digitalisiertes Analogsignal erzeugt, wobei das digitalisierte Analogsignal und das pulsierende Signal als multiplexiertes Komposit-Signal übertragen werden.

7. Anordnung nach einem der vorstehenden Ansprüche, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die Tonverarbeitungseinrichtung ein pulsierendes Signal erzeugt, dessen Impulsfrequenz einer Formant-Frequenz eines Audioeingangs entspricht.

8. Anordnung nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 6, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die Tonverarbeitungseinrichtung ein pulsierendes Signal erzeugt, dessen Impulsfrequenz von der Tonlagenfrequenz eines Audioeingangs abgeleitet ist.

9. Anordnung nach einem der vorstehenden Ansprüche, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die Tonverarbeitungseinrichtung wenigstens zwei pulsierende Signale erzeugt, die der Prothese (60) zugeführt werden, wobei die beiden pulsierenden Signale unterschiedliche Audio-Eingangs-Merkmale darstellen.

10. Anordnung nach Anspruch 9, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die unterschiedlichen Audio-Eingangsmerkmale die Tonlagenfrequenz und die Formant-Frequenz sind.

11. Anordnung nach einem der vorstehenden Ansprüche, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die Verbindungseinrichtung das Analogsignal und das pulsierende Signal den gleichen Elektroden der Prothese (60) zuführt.

Revendications

1. Un système de stimulation auditive comprenant des moyens de traitement de son (10) destinés à générer des signaux sous l'effet de signaux audio; des moyens d'émission (53) destinés à émettre les signaux générés; des moyens récepteurs (55) destinés à recevoir les signaux générés; une prothèse à électrodes multiples (60) destinée à stimuler la cochlée d'un utilisateur du système; et des moyens qui interconnectent les moyens récepteurs (55) et la prothèse (60), grâce à quoi les

signaux générés stimulent le nerf auditif de l'utilisateur du système, caractérisé en ce que les signaux générés comprennent un signal analogique qui est représentatif de sons audio, et un signal sous forme d'impulsions qui est représentatif de caractéristiques de sons audio, le signal analogique et le signal sous forme d'impulsions stimulant simultanément le nerf auditif de l'utilisateur du système.

2. Un système selon la revendication 1, caractérisé en ce que le signal analogique est émis vers au moins une électrode de prothèse qui est sélectionnée de façon à procurer la meilleure compréhension de la parole pour l'utilisateur du système.

3. Un système selon la revendication 1 ou la revendication 2, caractérisé en ce que la prothèse (60) est prévue pour être introduite dans la cochlée, et ses électrodes (62) correspondant à différentes gammes de fréquence audio.

4. Un système selon la revendication 1 et la revendication 2, caractérisé en ce que la prothèse (60) comprend des électrodes (56, 58) qui sont prévues pour être placées à l'extérieur de la cochlée, afin de stimuler le nerf auditif de l'utilisateur du système.

5. Un système selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, caractérisé en ce que le signal analogique et le signal sous forme d'impulsions sont transmis par des canaux de transmission séparés.

6. Un système selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 4, caractérisé en ce que les moyens de traitement de son génèrent un signal

analogique numérisé, et ce signal analogique numérisé et le signal sous forme d'impulsions sont transmis sous la forme d'un signal composite multiplexé.

7. Un système selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, caractérisé en ce que les moyens de traitement de son génèrent un signal sous forme d'impulsions qui a une cadence d'impulsions correspondant à une fréquence de formant d'un signal d'entrée audio.

8. Un système selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 6, caractérisé en ce que les moyens de traitement de son génèrent un signal sous forme d'impulsions qui a une cadence d'impulsions qui est déduite d'une fréquence de fondamental d'un signal d'entrée audio.

9. Un système selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, caractérisé en ce que les moyens de traitement de son génèrent au moins deux signaux sous forme d'impulsions qui sont transmis à la prothèse (60), et ces deux signaux sous forme d'impulsions représentent des caractéristiques différentes du signal d'entrée audio.

10. Un système selon la revendication 9, caractérisé en ce que les caractéristiques différentes du signal d'entrée audio sont une fréquence de fondamental et une fréquence de formant.

11. Un système selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, caractérisé en ce que les moyens d'interconnexion appliquent le signal analogique et le signal sous forme d'impulsions aux mêmes électrodes de la prothèse (60).

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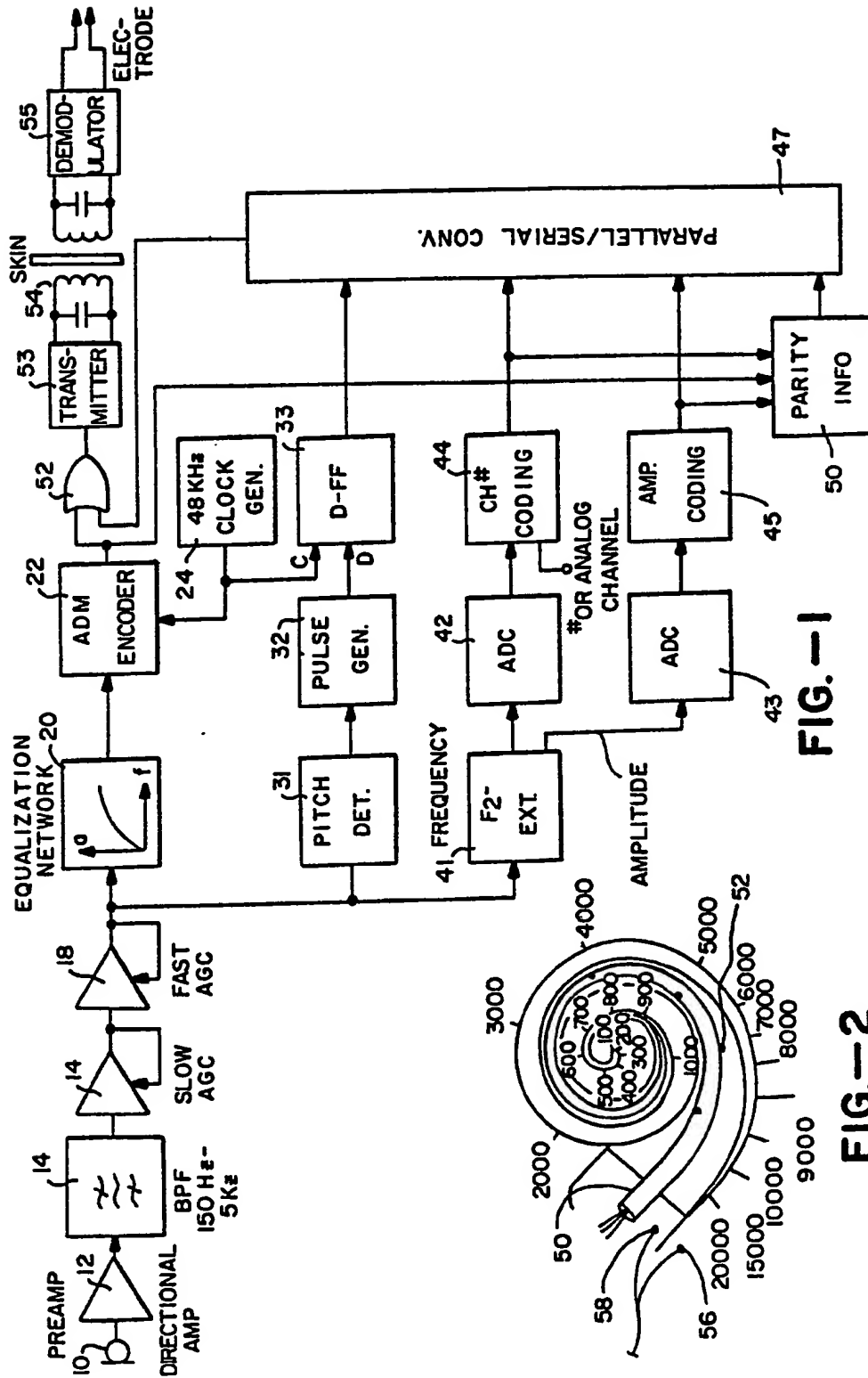


FIG.-1

FIG.-2

